

AEQUANIMITAS

BAREFOOT DOCTORS

I have previously expressed my admiration for medical life in China under the leadership of Chairman Mao whose sayings, directives, poems and other utterances are pertinent to every clinical and organizational problem. The October 1968 edition of *China's Medicine*, in English, has given me new insight into a fresh approach to the medical manpower shortage which is universal.

Our contemporary, the organ of the oriental C.M.A., adopts an editorial style which is forthright, blunt and caustic. A Canadian reader must accustom himself to the scorn which attaches to the words intellectual, middle-class, bourgeois, revisionist, capitalist, imperialist and Western and to the adulation which accompanies Comrade Bethune, working peasant, proletarian, poor, soldier, revolutionary, socialist and other popular terms. Having surmounted or ignored these semantic roadblocks, one begins to appreciate the significance of the theme "struggle-criticism-transformation" and the reality of the dictum "The working class must exercise leadership in everything."

Faced with a shortage of doctors, did China wring its hands about the lack of medical schools, the cost of research and the scarcity of teacher-scientists? Not at all. The 1965 words of the Chairman were recalled, "In medical and health work put the stress on the rural areas," and this naturally led to the development of the barefoot doctor who spends half his time farming and the other half doctoring. The Jiangzhen Commune has had the benefit of two contrasting approaches to training:

"This commune has trained its 'barefoot doctors' in two ways. One was by giving them short-term training in the commune clinic. There was an acute struggle between the two lines in this. One such training course, held on the eve of the great cultural revolution, was carried out in a way that was completely divorced from proletarian politics, divorced from the worker and peasant masses and from practice. It copied the old-line medical schools, giving eight lessons a day, undertaking 'regularization' and 'systematization', and requiring the trainees to bury themselves in books all day long. Although the training given thus behind closed doors was of some use, the trainees were, however, infected with bourgeois ideas of fame and gain. Some purchased a thick volume costing 9 yuan and showed off by carrying it round with them in the village. Some of the 'barefoot doctors' became unwilling to go barefoot any longer, but were keen to become city doctors in white smocks. During the great cultural revolution, another training class was held under the direct management of the poor and lower-middle peasants in co-ordination with the commune clinic and helped by the mobile medical teams. It was modelled on the Chinese People's Anti-Japanese

Military and Political College. 'Barefoot doctors' were also included in the leading group in charge of the two-month training class. Basic teaching material was the 'three constantly read articles' by Chairman Mao (*Serve the People*, *In Memory of Norman Bethune* and *The Foolish Old Man Who Removed the Mountains*). Class education was given them by the poor and lower-middle peasants, and instruction in medical skills was carried out in close connection with problems met within practice. When the course ended, every trainee expressed his wish to become a 'barefoot doctor' wholeheartedly serving the poor and lower-middle peasants."

This issue of *China's Medicine* contains several tributes and testimonials to the skill and acumen of these humble Asklepiads, all of the incidents showing up the arrogance and stupidity of the bourgeois exponents of revisionism and Western medicine. Another good example of the people's war against disease is related in an article on the eradication of schistosomiasis in Yukiang County. The specialists and professionals had fiddled around for years with snail counts, chemical molluscicides and with their futile efforts to treat patients with tartar emetic. Under the inspiring teaching of Chairman Mao the direct approach was applied. The peasants' co-operative filled in the ditches and ponds, suffocating the snails by burying, and the problem was solved.

Don't knock it, my friends; if events keep moving as they are, you too may be barefoot. A.D.K.

C.M.A. HOUSE, OTTAWA



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C.M.A. House, Ottawa

The roof is on; the floors have been laid and the duct work is in. We still hope to move in during the summer, provided the building trades, whose agreements expire on May 1, do not go on strike.

P.S.: Members are reminded that the Finishing & Furnishing Fund is still open to anyone wishing to make a contribution. As an alternative to a financial contribution, several members have donated a painting or other piece of art to grace the halls of the new C.M.A. House in Ottawa.